

Lesson 13 – Cooperator Mission (Session 2)

Objectives

1. To understand that as a Salesian Cooperator you will be sent as a servant and an instrument of God.
2. To know to whom the Salesian Cooperator is to be sent in the Salesian mission.
3. To come to know how in our modern world the youth problem is widespread and urgent.
4. To come to know what is the first priority in the Salesian mission.

Reference: The Salesian Cooperator, Joseph Aubry, SDB, pp. 49-53

God gave Don Bosco a heart “as wide as the seashore”: no matter whom he met, he always tried to do them some good – men or women, rich or poor, young or old, important or insignificant. Yet all his life-work shows clearly that he considered himself sent by God directly to *three categories of people*. The first of these was more important than the other two and in a sense gave rise to them: youth, the working classes and pagans.

Mission to the young – Two points need clarification regarding the age and social condition of the young. Don Bosco did not exclude children but he considered his mission to be directed more particularly to *the teenagers*. Two deep convictions guided his actions: youth was the age when decisions were made which affected the whole life of the person and the future of society; hence anything that endangered the harmonious development of the young was a serious matter; anything that saved it or helped it was important. *It was this very urgency and vastness of the matter that made him insist with his Cooperators*: “We must be united in these difficult times ... to remove or at least lessen the evils that endanger the good morals of youth, in whose hands lies the future of civil society” (Reg. 1876, ch. 1). “The Salesian Congregation is the bond that holds the Cooperators united; its primary aim is to work for the good of the young; the future is in their hands for good or for ill.... From all these places (Italy, Europe, China, America) come daily requests for priests to go and undertake the care of youth in moral danger.... It is for these great needs that we seek the help of the Cooperators.” (ibid., ch. 2).

Today Don Bosco’s reaction would be even greater; he would make his appeal to the Cooperators even more vigorous.

And now a further appeal: within the first priority is a super-priority – “*poor and abandoned*” youth. These terms need clarification, since there are various kinds of poverty: *economic, social and cultural*; and *emotional, religious and moral*. The former refers to cases of material poverty, social insecurity, helplessness and a culture that is very low-level. [This level of living] impedes the development of individual capacities and the ability of self-expression in accordance with human dignity.... The other kind of poverty has to do with the disintegration of family life.... In practice this second kind of poverty takes on different traits depending on the diverse and changing conditions of times and places.

We arrive now at the point of finding the *true priority* of Salesian activity. Don Bosco did not exclude youth of affluent families who were religiously and morally poor; but his preference was always for the victims of economic, social and cultural poverty.

It should be added that Don Bosco was always interested in the young (and not so young), whether rich or poor, who showed signs and dispositions of a *vocation* to the priesthood or religious life. This too is one of the explicit aims of the activity of the Salesian family (cf. Const. 1874, art. 1).

Reference: Peter Rinaldi, Man with a Dream (New Rochelle: Salesiana, 1997), pp. 1-2

Don Bosco's Dream

A dream I had when I was nine years old left an indelible impression on my mind. I dreamt I was in a large field, not far from home, with a crowd of boys, most of whom were playing, while some were at their worst behavior, as was evidenced by their foul language. I went right up to them and began to rough them up with my fist and harsh words, when suddenly a man appeared, clad in a dazzling white robe, his bearing noble and majestic, his face so bright I could hardly bear to look at him. He called me by name and told me to take charge of those boys, adding: "You will never make them your friends by treating them that way. Be kind and gentle with them. Come now, show them how they can mend their ways and become decent boys."

I was so awed and frightened that all I could do was stammer something about being a poor ignorant boy, quite unable to lecture anyone, let alone those boys. I noticed, in the meantime, that they all had left their games and had quietly gathered around the mysterious man. I then spoke to him again; and, not quite knowing what I was saying, I ventured to say to him, "Who are you to tell me to do such impossible things?"

"What seems impossible to you now," he answered, "you will be able to do later through obedience and study."

"But how can I ever hope to be able to study and learn about those things?"

"I will give you a guide who can instruct you as no one else can."

"But who are you to speak to me that way?"

"You know my mother. You greet her three times a day, the way your mother taught you."

"My mother always tells me not to have anything to do with strangers, unless I ask her permission. Tell me your name."

Suddenly I saw a stately lady at his side, wearing a beautiful mantle, all studded with gems that shone like stars. Seeing how hopelessly confused I was, she bade me come close to her, and taking my hand, "Look," she said. The boys had all vanished, and in their place were now all sorts of animals: goats, dogs, wildcats, bears...." This will be your field of action," the lady continued, "but first you must grow up to be humble, strong and sturdy. The change you will see in these animals, you will then bring about in my children."

I looked again, and all those wild beasts were suddenly changing into lambs, bleating and playfully skipping all around us. It was all too much for me, and I started to cry while I kept begging the lady to tell me what all this meant. She gently placed her hand on my head, "Someday, in due time," she said, smiling, "you will understand everything." It was at this point that I awoke and realized that it was all a dream.

Reference: Fr. Pascual Chavez Villanueva, Rector Major, addressing youths at Ramsey, N.J., Sept. 7, 2007

My dear young people, the most important thing in life is to have a dream. Otherwise you are lost. To have a dream is to have a mission. That becomes the driving force in your life. Even in the most difficult moments of your life, you will have the energy to move ahead.

Reference: PVA Statutes, Chapter 1, Article 1

The Founder: A Man Sent by God

To contribute to the salvation of youth, "the most delicate and most precious portion of human society," the Holy Spirit, through the maternal intervention of Mary, raised up St. John Bosco who founded the Society of St. Francis de Sales (1859) and, with Saint Mary Dominica Mazzarello, the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (1872). He extended the apostolic energy of the Salesian charism by officially setting up the "Pious Union of Salesian

Cooperators,” the third branch of the Family (1876), united to the Society of St. Francis de Sales (also called the Salesian Society of St. John Bosco or the Salesian Congregation).

The Holy Spirit formed the heart of a father and teacher in St. John Bosco, one capable of total dedication, inspiring him with an educational method permeated by the charity of the Good Shepherd.

Suggested Reading

In the Footsteps of Don Bosco; pages 136-137.

Chapter 3 – Early Fruits of the Salesians: Dominic Savio, cont.

Toughening Up

Imagine a boy of ten trudging a total of twelve miles to and from school every day for a whole school year. That's what Dominic Savio did, because the school he attended was three miles away from home, and he had to go and come twice a day. On one very hot day an elderly man met the boy and asked, "Aren't you afraid to walk so far alone on this country road?"

"I'm not alone," replied Dominic. "I have my guardian angel with me at every step."

"But surely you find the journey long and tiresome in this very hot weather!"

"Nothing seems tiresome or painful when you are working for a Master who pays well."

"And who is your master?"

"He is God, our Creator, who rewards even a cup of cold water given for love of him."

This long walk every day, however, took its toll on young Dominic's health. Therefore, the next year his parents decided to move from Murialdo to another village called Mondonio.

In the school at Mondonio an incident occurred which nearly cost Dominic his good reputation. One day a serious offense was committed by a certain pupil who, if discovered, would be expelled. The culprit's scheme threw all the blame on eleven-year-old Dominic Savio. Next day the class received a scolding. Dominic was singled out as a culprit who deserved to be expelled, but since it was his first offense he was to be pardoned, but never again.

The boy made no reply but stood hanging his head. However, the real guilty boy was soon discovered. Regretting his previous harsh words, the teacher asked Dominic why he had not defended himself.

His answer came slowly but simply: "I knew that the guilty fellow was already under threat of expulsion for other things, but I hoped to be forgiven since it would be my first offense. I also remembered how our Lord had been unjustly accused."

Some months afterward, in October of 1854, the parish priest arranged the meeting between Dominic Savio and Don Bosco, and that famous conversation took place.

Dominic Starts at Don Bosco's School

When he entered Don Bosco's office for the first time, Dominic noticed an ornamented placard hanging on the wall. It read, DA MIHI ANIMAS; CAETERA TOLLE.

"What do those words mean, Father?"

The priest's heart leapt with joy. It was exactly what he wished. "And I longed that he would understand the meaning," wrote Don Bosco.

"That's my motto, Dominic. It means: GIVE ME SOULS; TAKE AWAY ALL ELSE."

"Ah! I understand, Father. Here the aim is not money but souls. That's what I want to do, save my soul. Help me, won't you, Father?"

At that moment the seed of a new type of holiness was sown in Dominic's soul. His would no longer remain a merely personal holiness, but it would begin to be active and communicative. The boy had begun to understand, and he would

understand more and more as time went on. Meanwhile, Don Bosco patiently and prudently awaited occasions for forming his young pupil more and more.

Goodness, by its nature, is communicative. God is infinitely good, and he has communicated some of his goodness to all created things and people. In the history of humanity, nothing appears so communicative as sanctity. Henri Bergson, an outstanding philosopher, studied this phenomenon and was so impressed that he asserted there is no argument which more conclusively proves the presence of God in the world than the beneficent dynamism of the saints of the Church. St. John Bosco, Dominic Savio's teacher and guide, illustrates this truth admirably. Don Bosco was so engrafted in Christ, the Vine, that Pope Pius XI characterized him as "Union with God." Don Bosco imbibed his goodness and apostolic spirit directly from Christ, and young Dominic imbibed the same spirit through his master, Don Bosco.

December 8, 1854

At the time Dominic entered the Salesian school in Turin, the whole Catholic world was awaiting the proclamation of the dogma of our Lady's Immaculate Conception. Under Don Bosco's saintly direction, the boys were keenly aware of the coming event. The atmosphere in the school was vibrating with an enthusiasm that only a very devout son of Mary, such as Don Bosco was, could arouse.

Upon Don Bosco's suggestion, in the evening of that memorable December 8, 1854, Dominic went to our Lady's altar in the school chapel. There he offered himself, body and soul, to the Immaculate Mother of God, and he renewed the four resolutions of his first Holy Communion, especially the last, DEATH BUT NOT SIN!

"From that day onward," wrote Don Bosco, "Dominic made such evident progress in virtue that I began to write down everything I noticed about him."